

Your Friday Feature

Art in the City / Week 19

Bust of Madison Cawein



Joseph Leeland Roop (1869-1932)

Bust of Madison Cawein 1913

Planning on spending some time in Louisville's libraries this summer? Take some time to look around at the artworks on display. In a recent project to catalog some of Louisville Free Public Library's collection, Louisville Public Art Initiative's Spring intern Hillary Sullivan, a master's candidate in Curatorial Studies at the University of Louisville, took a closer look at some of the works in the library's collection and the stories behind them.

One such work, located on the second floor of Louisville's Main Library in the reference section, is a bust created to commemorate the Kentucky poet Madison Cawein. Bust of Madison Cawein was sculpted by Joseph L. Roop in 1913. Roop sculpted another work originally housed in Main Branch, a life-size plaster sculpture of Stephen Collins Foster. After his start in Louisville, Roop moved to Hollywood where he worked on crafting 'animated miniatures' for over 700 movies such as *The Lost World* in 1925. (The film is now in the public domain and can be viewed here https://archive.org/details/lost_world). Roop also worked at the satellite site of the Los Angeles Museum of History, Art and Science located at the La Brea Tar Pits where he made models and casts of the prehistoric animals found on site which were later used for the museum's dioramas.

The Louisville Literature Club commissioned Roop to do a bust of Madison Cawein that was unveiled April 26, 1913. Cawein (1865-1914) was an accomplished poet and author who penned thirty-six books and 1,500 poems and soon gained the nickname 'Keats of Kentucky.' The author and poet lived on Saint James Court and was an ardent supporter of the Louisville Free Public Library and even attended the opening of the Highland Branch in 1908. His poem *Waste Land* is thought to have inspired the work of poet T.S. Eliot. The following passage from Cawein's poem *A Boy's Heart* captures the essence of a Kentucky summer in the country at the turn of the century:

It's out and away at break of day,

To frolic and run in the sun-sweet hay:

It's up and out with a laugh and shout

Let the old world know that a boy's about.

It's ho for the creek that the minnows streak, That the sunbeams dapple, the cattle seek; For a fishing-pole and a swimming-hole, Where a boy can loaf and chat with his soul.

It's oh to lie and look at the sky

Through the roof of the leaves that's built so high:

Where all day long the birds make song,

And everything 's right and nothing is wrong.

A virtual exhibit on the history of LFPL's collection curated by Hillary Sullivan and featuring a variety of works on view at the Main Branch of the library will be available online in the next few weeks.

(Essay by Hillary Sullivan and Kristin Gilbert)

